DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 370 EA 027 557

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TITLE Cultural Politics and Education in the 1990s.
PUB DATE Sep 95
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the European Conference of Educational Research (Bath, England, United Kingdom, September 14-17, 1995).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Conservatism; Educational Change; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Policy Formation; *Politics of Education; Power Structure; *Resistance to Change; *Social Change; Social Structure; Teaching (Occupation)
IDENTIFIERS *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This paper begins by discussing reasons for the failure of important aspects of Conservative education policy in the United Kingdom and finds them in contemporary Conservatism's "fundamentalist" handling of questions of culture and tradition. The term "fundamentalist" refers to certain religious, cultural, and political ideologies that invoke a narrow and authority-centered account of tradition without attempting to enter into discourse about its value or premises. The paper then discusses the cultural meaning of teachers' opposition to Conservatism, as manifested in the national testing boycott of 1993-94. The paper suggests that aspects of social-movement theory can illuminate the achievements of this opposition. It concludes by considering what space for cultural action is offered by the educational policies of the new Labour Party. A problem with the Labour Party's agenda is that it discounts the intellectual work of teachers as well as the persistence and increasing sophistication with which questions relating to learning, cultural difference, and inequality have been pursued in schools. (Contains 24 endnotes.) (LMI)

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ED 395 370

CULTURAL POLITICS AND EDUCATION IN THE 1990s

Paper for the symposium on Post-Conservative Programmes of Reform

European Conference on Educational Research, Bath 1995

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Abstract

This paper begins by discussing reasons for the failure of important aspects of Conservative education policy, and finds them in contemporary Conservatism's "fundamentalist" handling of questions of culture and tradition. The paper goes on to discuss the cultural meaning of teachers' opposition to Conservatism, as manifested in the testing boycott of 1993/4. It suggests that aspects of social movement theory can illuminate the achievements of this opposition. The paper concludes by considering what space for cultural action is offered by the educational policies of the new Labour Party.

As an exemplification of its claims, the paper refers particularly to the working culture of English teachers. This material, drawn from a larger research project, is also discussed in two articles - Cultural Problems of Conservatism and A New Kind of Cultural Politics: Teachers and the 1993 Boycott of Testing, published in Changing English, Volume 1, Number 2 and Volume 2, Number 1, respectively.

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I

Between 1991 and 1993, Conservatism enjoyed its months of educational triumph. Since this period is now in some respects a distant one, it is worth recalling some of its main features. These centred on the attempt to revise, in a rightward direction, earlier Conservative achievements - to reorder a settlement which was thought to rest on too great a compromise with established educational interests. It was this very rapid process of revision which provided the connecting context for a number of policy decisions and legislative proposals: the virtual abolition of GCSE coursework; the attempts to rewrite National Curriculum English; the sudden alterations in the SAT (national testing) regime; the publication in 1992 of the government consultation paper Choice and Diversity, which promised the near-eradication of local authority influence in education. Meanwhile, ministerial derision of what was taken to be established, "progressive" educational wisdom reached new heights, while partisan Conservatives were appointed to key positions in educational quangos. (1)

Taken as a whole, this strategy of the offensive failed. My purpose in the first part of this paper is to review some of the reasons for its failure. At the political level, these are often obvious enough: the teachers' boycott of SATs rendered impossible planned changes in curriculum and assessment; the 1994 campaign of parents and governors against spending cuts discredited the Conservatives' central assumption of an antagonism between producer (teacher) and consumer interests. The government entered these conflicts in haste. Its day-to-day policies were provocative, and incompetently administered. (2) But these factors alone do not provide a sufficient explanation for Conservative failure, whose important ideological and cultural dimensions this paper will now seek to capture.

II

Sympathetic accounts of Conservatism always stress its understanding of the interconnectedness of past and present, expressed through the idea of tradition. Tradition provides what Anthony Quinton calls "the texture of inherited customs and institutions which endow (people) with their specifically social nature". (3) It constitutes the matrix within which both identity and knowledge - "the accumulated practical wisdom of the community" - are formed.

The companion of this social theory is - in accounts like these - a gradualist political outlook. Large-scale schemes for social transformation are suspect in principle, since they threaten to disrupt the social order out of which cultural and political cohesion arises. Conservatives, as Viscount Hailsham put it, "do not believe that each generation in turn should start from scratch, abandoning all the wisdom of the past; on the contrary, they consider that progress consists in each generation beginning at the point where their fathers left off." (4) Progress, Hailsham insists, does not consist in scrapping the achievements

of the past. From a similar position, the philosopher Michael Oakeshott warns Conservatives against responding to the threat of left-wing change with their own transformative programmes. To do so would be to adopt a fatally "rationalist disposition of mind" in which "the politics of destruction and creation have been substituted for the politics of repair, the consciously planned and deliberately executed being considered (for that reason) better than what has grown up and established itself unselfconsciously." (5)

The social theory and its concomitant political outlook are, of course, the products of specific circumstances. To stress the importance to social behaviour of a texture of inherited customs and institutions makes sense only in a particular kind of world, where cultural continuity is a fact of national life. Such a stress does not embody any universal truth about human behaviour, and its applicability to contemporary society is open to question.

This latter point is pursued by Anthony Giddens in Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics. Tradition, for Giddens, is to be distinguished from habit, custom or technical knowledge. Its distinctive quality is that it "presumes an idea of ritual or revealed truth". This defining trait is also "the origin of its authority". (6) Tradition in this classical sense is a declining force, and the world we inhabit can fairly be described as "post-traditional". To use this term does not imply that tradition - in the more general sense of cultural continuity across generations - has disappeared, but it has changed its status. To retain any widespread allegiance, tradition must now leave the world of *a priori* truth and be prepared to explain and prove itself, laying itself open to interrogation and dialogue.(7)

Giddens offers several reasons for this shift. Globalisation has eroded, if not eliminated, the authority of national cultural forms. Changes in class and family structures have significantly weakened other aspects of cultural continuity. And, perhaps most importantly, there is the growth of what Giddens calls "social reflexivity". His argument here bears quoting at some length:

"In a detraditionalising society individuals must become used to filtering all sorts of information relevant to their life situations and routinely act on the basis of that filtering process. Take the decision to get married. Such a decision has to be made in relation to an awareness that marriage has changed in basic ways over the past few decades, that sexual habits and identities have altered too, and that people demand more autonomy in their lives than ever before. Moreover, this is not just knowledge about an independent social reality; as applied in action, it influences what that reality actually is." (8)

The concept of reflexivity is a productive one: we can recognise the marriage decision as just one of a myriad reflexive acts which comprise post-traditional social practice, and which transform established institutions. If marriage, for instance,

has become a negotiated and contingent relationship, then the nature of education has likewise been altered by the activities of those involved in it. The school, which was for a long time thought of as the site of a simple transmission of a society's roles and values has now come to be perceived as a place where students learn how to learn - how to develop the capacity to generate new meanings. Such a redefinition alters the status of school knowledge, which loses much of the unquestioned charcater of its authority.

The accumulated effect of these changes - across a range of social practices - has been to produce large numbers of individuals who are accustomed to making decisions by synthesising information from a diversity of sources - local knowledge, tradition, science, mass communications. Giddens argues that they owe no allegiance to a single tradition, are accustomed to handling complexity in their work and social lives, and are sceptical of established bureaucratic and political authority. They are, in short, what Giddens - with no sense of social exclusiveness -calls "clever people". As such they are both typical products of contemporary society, and actors in some of its most important conflicts.

Reflexivity and detraditionalisation are concepts which illuminate, but do not fully account for, the terms in which everyday life is experienced. Giddens notes that the processes he describes have provoked a powerful challenge from conservatism. The terms of this challenge he calls "fundamentalist" - a term he uses to describe certain religious, cultural and political ideologies. In each case, fundamentalism involves the invocation of tradition without the attempt to enter into dialogue about its value or premises. (9). In doing so, it takes on a dogmatic character. Rather than engaging with the concrete complexities of modern life, it takes refuge in formulaic and impoverished versions of "tradition" which have lost much of their practical force. It offers no vantage-point from which to comprehend a fast-changing cultural landscape, and the social programmes it inspires are incapable of gaining a secure foothold in the society whose problems they seek to address. In many cases, "tradition" does no more than provide the rhetorical accompaniment to economic liberalism, whose market-centred policies destroy real cultural continuities. Fundamentalism then offers in place of these continuities a a narrow and authority-centred account of tradition.

Giddens' account is usefully complemented by the work of Goran Therborn, which suggests ways in which Giddens account can be concretely located in the history of the last three decades. Therborn has recently drawn a distinction between aspects of social relations prevailing in Western Europe in the 1970s, and those which dominate the 1990s. (10) The earlier period is characterised by the relative autonomy of many state apparatuses from direct political control by central government. Within these apparatuses - education is obviously an example - there developed a dense network of "associational" activity. Such activity, which included the work of trade unions, professional organisations and

state-sponsored institutions, led to the elaboration of complex sectoral agendas. These agendas tended towards political and ideological pluralism, and legitimised a contestation with aspects of established authority. In doing so, we could argue - extending Therborn's account - they acted as agents of detraditionalisation, thus exemplifying within a limited sector some of the tendencies identified by Giddens. Their freedom of action, however, was soon curtailed. From the mid-seventies onwards, argues Therborn, these tendencies confronted increasingly strong counter-measures. Urged on by the political right, governments acted in ways that reduced sectoral autonomy, enforced market-based and/or managerial cultures, and simplified sectoral agendas to the point where issues of social and cultural difference were pushed to the margins of policy. In doing so, government policy had the effect of thinning out dense networks of associationalism and replacing them with much simpler models of direct control. Conservative fundamentalism, it could be said, played an important role in motivating and justifying this process. Placing together Giddens' and Therborn's accounts, it can be argued the tendency of the right is to replace reflexivity and to reduce associational initiative. It has had some success in doing this. But whether the success can endure, and can establish itself at the heart of the social processes of a detraditionalised world is a different question. Recent conflicts in education suggest that there are strict limits to the success of right-wing programmes, limits which are set as much by the social relations and cultural forms of contemporary society, as by the pre-given strength of political opponents.

III

In many respects, Conservative education policies in 1991-93 harked back to what were imagined to be traditions established in an earlier, pre-progressive period. Controversies over the teaching of English - the subject at the heart of so much cultural warfare - make this particularly clear. The famous "anthology of literature", on which were based English tests for 14-year olds, depicted a pastoral way of life, mostly innocent of cultural difference. (11) The 1992 statement announcing the reconstruction of the National Curriculum in English celebrated the values of "traditional grammar", the literary canon, Standard English, and the teaching of reading through phonic methods. Ministers' speeches at this time were loaded with hostility to any signs of the appearance of popular cultural forms - soap opera, TV sit coms - in the English curriculum. (12)

The most striking thing about the traditions evoked in these ways was their marginality. Far from commanding general assent - let alone positive allegiance - this kind of programme appeared, to most people involved in education, as something eccentric, possessing not the slightest element of revealed truth. Why this should be so - why there is such a large gap between the claims of the programme and the perceptions and commitments of those charged with implementing it - is a phenomenon worth investigating.

The 1944 Education Act was a response to an endemic conflict between a system based on narrowly selective institutions and the pressure for the entrance of members of non-elite groups on to the educational and cultural scene. Like other legislation of the immediate post-war years, it provided only a partial resolution of the conflicts it addressed. Nevertheless, it helped bring about what Bill Schwarz (13) has called a swing of "cultural power" away from conservatism. In recognising the principle of secondary education for all, in establishing local authority control and in allowing a strong measure of teacher influence on the curriculum, it set up a framework which - given the strength of other cultural forces in the post-war period - acted as what one conservative writer has termed a "giant umbrella under which all sorts of experiments could flourish." (14) This is too hyperbolic a judgment, which overlooks the inertia of large parts of the school system. Yet it does point to an important tendency: in conditions marked by loose national control and an intellectual climate favourable to "equality of opportunity", educationalists were able to reshape curricula in ways that were both critical of received definitions of culture, and responsive to pressures arising from important cultural changes in the post-war period - such as the growth of youth sub-cultures, as well as later feminist and multi-cultural developments.

This reshaping was piecemeal rather than comprehensive, incremental rather than dramatically radical. Nevertheless, by the 1980s, it had become substantial enough to trouble Conservatism. We can understand its signifiance, in relation to the cultural meaning of the post-war settlement, by considering briefly two of its elements - again centred on questions of English teaching. The first concerns language: since 1944 and (especially) since the early 1970s, non-standard forms of English have established a much stronger, <u>recognised</u> place in the classroom. Standard English has lost some of its normative force, and issues of "correctness" have to some extent been problematised. These developments are part of a more general shift, in which the relationship between the experiences of learners and the formal, organised knowledge of the school has become more central to educational thinking. This shift, in turn, relates to wider developments - the erosion of authoritative cultural norms, the forceful presence of subordinate dialects, related to class and ethnicity, within the public arena.

A second important element of curriculum change is likewise related to these processes of fragmentation. Consistently, throughout the post-war period, narrow, elite definitions of culture have been challenged: theoretically, by writers like Raymond Williams and subsequent exponents of Cultural Studies; practically, in the explosion of non-print media and the cultural production of non-elite groups, especially of young people. In several ways, the school English curriculum has responded to these developments: through the development of Media Studies; through aspects of creative writing - such as autobiography; through arriving at much broader definitions of a literary canon. Changing (slowly, unevenly) in these ways, the curriculum has reflected not so much the prejudices of unrepresentative groups

of enthusiasts as an enduring and widely-shared effort to respond to important tendencies in post-war cultural life.

A precondition for such work has been the growth of new kinds of skill, knowledge and self-consciousness among teachers. Part of this growth has arisen from the institutional changes which picked up pace in the 1960s, with the spread of graduate teacher training courses, in-service teacher education and specialised subject associations. Its other aspects are less palpable but equally as important. They have their roots in an intersection between an education system attempting to address a wider constituency, a better-educated teaching force and a student population which was increasingly unwilling to accept the established curriculum. It was at this intersection that various strands of progressive education came into their own, offering practical means of addressing the curricular problems of change. The raising of the school-leaving age to 16, for instance, confronted teachers of examination classes with large numbers of previously-excluded working-class students. Their presence highlighted the unworkability of many aspects of the traditional curriculum and served to encourage the development of new kinds of exam course, devised and assessed at school level. In their relative freedom from the constraits of set texts and in their reliance upon coursework rather than terminal exams, these courses threw teachers and students into a process of negotiated learning, in which the relationship between school curriculum and student culture was at least partly reshaped.

Fundamentalist conservatism - from the Black Papers onwards - has interpreted these changes as an example of what Oakeshott called "the politics of destruction" - of the overturning of established virtues, in favour of the brash, untested novelty. In making this judgement it has persistently misunderstood the "organic" nature of the new curriculum - the way in which it was related to concrete problems and complex, evolving intellectual paradigms. Coursework-based examination reform in English, for instance, forced on teachers a range of difficult, but productive issues: the planning of courses and their assessment, the selection of texts, the development of more demanding kinds of writing. Dealing with these tasks required a long - unfinished - process of engagement, in which political beliefs, theoretical understandings, institutional constraints and classroom practicalities were all involved. The outcome of this process was not only a greater sophistication and confidence among teachers but also the creation of what, in Quinton's words, could be called "a texture of customs and institutions" incorporating "the accumulated practical wisdom" of a community. In short, it amounted to the elaboration of a distinctive tradition, a collective and complex effort of cultural activity, grounded in the social experience of the post-war years, and to that extent at least, rational.

It is the rationality of this tradition (that is to say the depth of its implantation in a particular historical experience) with which Conservatives have had difficulty. It is as if they have no means of recognising tradition except in a form which, through

making some sacral or timeless claim, signals blatantly its conservative tendencies. This problem of recognition has immediate political consequences: it places conservatism outside many aspects of post-war history, and offers it no means of engaging with them. It is from this difficulty, perhaps, that there arises one of the most striking features of Conservative educational politics: that as its educational power increases, its influence declines; the more securely right-wing thinking establishes itself at the head of Conservative policy, the more the concrete consequences of that policy alienate one-time supporters, and serve to mobilise an opposition. This was exactly the case with government assessment policy in 1992/3. Resting initially on the belief that no allies could be found among English teachers for the project that it had in mind, it placed the responsibility for change in the hands of "outsiders". Change was to be decided by small appointed committees, with the minimum of interference from professional interests. Consultation was an obstacle to change, not one of its pre-conditions.

The fundamentalist rigour of this position was quickly undermined. Conservatism proceeded as if no major intellectual issues were at stake in the measures it adopted. In doing so, it neglected 20 years of school-centred work on language, culture and learning. Resisting dialogue, and operating with great speed, the committees charged with curriculum and assessment reform proceeded to affront the central principles and working habits of teachers. This was the context of a spectacular policy failure.

IV

So far I have loked at the educational conflicts of the 1990s from an angle which highlights the problems of government policy. I now want to assume a different perspective, which focuses on the way in which these conflicts have revealed resources for the making of educational alternative policies.

Eyerman and Jamison's book Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach is both a critical summary of previous work on social movements, and an attempt to place the production of knowledge at the core of our understanding of what it is that social movements do. For Eyerman and Jamison, social movements - such as environmentalism and the American civil rights movement - are "historical actors articulating long-term trends and deep-seated social forces". (15) They are also - the authors' distinctive stress - "forms of activity by which individuals create new kinds of social identity". (16) This identity-creation has a strong cognitive element, since social movements "provide the breeding ground for innovations in thought as well as in the social organisation of thought". They are the bearers of new ideas, a major part of whose significance lies in the ability to act as two-way mediators between popular and professional knowledge: they can transform everyday knowledge into systematised understanding and also "provide new contexts for the re-interpretation of professional knowledge". (17) In such work, the application and diffusion of knowledge is as important as its "discovery".

Alberto Melucci's studies of new social movements in Northern Italy, brought togther in Nomads of the Present, indicate some of the ways in which such knowledge and identity are co-created, and suggest how they are further developed through conflict with established norms. For Melucci, collective action is made possible by the "daily production of alternative frameworks of meaning". (18) "The potential for resistance or opposition is sewn into the very fabric of daily life. It is located in the molecular experience of individuals or groups who practise the alternative meanings of everyday life." (19) As such, it is usually invisible: the resistance it embodies "is not expressed in collective forms of conflictual mobilisations". For this latent potential to be made visible, specific circumstances are necessary.

To put the argument in another way, political action has cultural pre-conditions. It depends upon well-developed networks whose core activities are related to the production of knowledge and identities. The conflict between these networks and some aspect of governmental or corporate policy sparks a diffusion of the network's achievements, and brings its ideas and practices within the scope of a wider public understanding. In the words of Eyerman and Jamison, they offer to a wider constituency "the possibility of new projects, new ways of seeing the world and of organising social life". (20) They "extend emancipatory aims" beyond the conventionally defined realm of politics, into cognitive and cultural areas.

The conclusions of these theorists are based on the study of autonomous social movements, not of bodies of state employees. Translating their argument into terms applicable to present educational conflicts is a risky and debatable business - one whose nuances I have little time to explore here. Teachers are not environmental or civil rights activists. To a much greater extent than those involved in autonomous movements, they are caught up in processes of normalisation and regulation, and the complexity of their role must not be forgotten by anyone who wishes to stress the emancipatory possibilities of their work. Nevertheless, it is possible to utilise work such as that of Melucci and Eyerman/Jamison to highlight the significance of teachers' involvement in recent conflicts.

Drawing on Eyerman and Jamison, it is possible to describe the teachers' boycott of national testing in 1993 and (to a lesser extent) in 1994 as a means of popularising professional knowledge. Whereas its opponents on the right relied on high-level lobbying, ministerial diktat and the orchestration of media panics, the boycott was based on first-hand involvement by large numbers of teachers and on a strategy of direct address to parents and the wider public - through leaflets, letters, exhibitions, meetings. In this respect, it could be seen as a practical rethinking of strategies for collective "industrial" action. The unsuccessful pay and conditions campaign of the 1980s had been based on ever more intense industrial action, not sufficiently supported by an attentiveness to the educational concerns of parents and other possible constituencies of support.

The boycott provided a chance to revise earlier strategic errors: hence the enormous, painstaking effort to win parental approval and to convert teachers' deeply-felt commitments into the discursive basis of a popular campaign. In the process, the boycott suggested the possibility of a new kind of identity for teachers - as popularisers of particular models of learning, and bearers of a new relationship between professionals and public.

To say this is to describe the more visible aspects of the boycott's cultural meaning. It does not yet address what Melucci calls its latent aspect - the slow development of "alternative" knowledges and identities, whose discursive power was eventually spotlighted in the conflicts of 1993-4. For English teachers such a development centred on what could be called "the social question" - the position within the system of large numbers of students from subordinate social groups. When linked to the main innovations in learning theory of the later post-war period, this socio-cultural emphasis took on an even greater importance. "Knowledge", stated the Bullock report of 1975, does not exist independently of someone who knows." What is known,"must in fact be brought to life afresh within every knower by his own efforts." Bringing knowledge into being is "a formulating process, and language is its ordinary means." (21) These arguments - so different in their stress on creative reinterpretation from Conservative understandings of the ways in which culture and knowledge are reproduced - allowed a new, more coherent and language-centred approach to the progressive maxim that children are agents in their own learning. In the policy and cultural context of the period, these ideas took on another layer of importance. "Knowers" did not all inhabit the same language and culture, so to address the heart of the processes by which knowledge was formed in classroom contexts entailed an attention to cultural difference. Thus language - which Bullock placed at the centre of the English curriculum - became the site where socio-cultural questions encountered ones of learning development, and questions about the future of the curriculum were crossed with those arising from the major cultural conflicts of the post-war period.

English teachers, through their day-to-day involvement in developing an classroom agenda based on such intersections, were thus caught up in responding to major social and cultural issues. Their work increasingly involved the reshaping of established ideas about learning, as well as the recognition of emerging social relations - such as those concerned with multi-ethnicity. In this work they placed considerable personal investment and through it they formed a strong collective identity. The boycott revealed the political force latent in this slow development of an educational practice. It not only offered new models of teacher organisation, which complemented and transcended trade unionism; it also demonstrated what were potentially the formative stages of a new educational politics, in which questions of culture and learning were centrally placed.
Whether or not this potential is fulfilled depends, however, on a wider kind of politics - and it is to this area that the paper finally turns.

V

The general outlines of Labour's education policy are by now well-known. A Labour government, says Tony Blair, will be distinguished by its "passion" for education (22) - a passion embodied in the drive to raise achievement and qualification, to such a level that will enable Britain to compete more successfully in the global economy. For this to happen there have to be substantial changes, not just in the legacy of Conservative reform, but in the Labour Party's educational outlook. In this latter context, Blair is explicit in linking Labour's rethinking of education to its rethinking of Clause 4. In a "new world of change, competition and innovation ... modernisation ... applies to comprehensive education too."

The most concrete thinking about what modernisation might involve has occurred in the various commissions and think-tanks which influence Labour's policy-making. The National Commission on Education's Learning to Succeed - a book-length document accompanied by the publication of several dozen "briefing" and "insight" papers - was the product of a lengthy and well-informed discussion, involving professional educational interests as well as those of industry and politics. It contains no trace of the disabling nostalgia which pervades Conservative policy. It concentrates instead on a different aspect of "tradition" - on the divisions which characterise English education. It notes the contrast between minority success and majority frustration, and the huge variations in provision, access and quality which sustain such differences. It does so, however, from a perspective whose central focus is unwavering: however desirable the pursuit of social justice, the first priority of policy is to recognise economic reality:

"It is not always as well understood as it should be how fundamental the performance of the economy is to the well-being of the country. If industry and commerce flourish, they provide the basis for a good standard of living. Jobs depend on wealth creation, and hence the well-being both of individual people and of families and communities." (23)

In this perspective, educational policies are derived from what are seen as the necessities of international competition on a free-market basis. There are differences, of course, between the NCE's position and that of economic liberalism. The NCE recognises that markets are in many respects dysfunctional, and do not provide a good basis for the organisation of functions such as education and health care. Correspondingly, intelligent, targeted state provision can - as with "Rhineland" capitalism (FN) - create a workforce which is educated, adaptable and all the more competitive for being so. Nevertheless, in its emphasis on "necessities" and its proposition that the school should service these demands, it repeats the pattern of conventional post-1976, post-Callaghan-at-Ruskin educational thinking. It thus shows little interest in the experiences and cultures of the majority of the population. In fact, the whole area of "culture" - the complex and conflict-ridden world in which teachers and

learners make sense of their experiences and define their aspirations - is missing from Learning to Succeed.

The agenda set out by Tony Blair seems likewise incomplete. The major educational reports of the heyday of reform - the 60s and 70s - had little direct to say about education and work. (24) Blair's statements emphatically correct this weakness. On the other hand, however, these reports were very much concerned with the effects of the division of labour and the organisation of work. They took the cultural dimensions of class very seriously: the "problem" of an educationally intractable working-class culture and the gap between that culture and the formal knowledge embodied in the school curriculum lies at the centre of their thinking. Concern of this sort served to encourage and legitimise the classroom practices I described in sections III and IV. Blair's statements, however, like the party's official documents, contain no discussion of terms such as "class" and "culture" and contain surprisingly undeveloped curricular positions. My guess is that these absences will have important consequences for the development and success of overall policy. The most fundamental promises of Labour's programme - those concerning universal access and a rapid and substantial rise in levels of educational achievement - are unlikely to be achieved without a much wider social focus that is currently being adopted. "Culture" must be a key element in any such rethinking.

There are similar problems, I think, with Labour's attitude towards the teaching force. Tony Blair's position combines proposals for a greater degree of institutional recognition of teachers' professionalism (embodied most of all in a professional council) with a critique of many features of teachers' occupational culture - most evidently, their attachment to unstreamed teaching in primary schools. Beyond conventional politenesses, he gives little recognition to the intellectual resources available in the work of teachers. Instead, the emphasis falls on managerial approaches. Drawing especially from the work of school effectiveness theorists, Blair emphasises the need to develop replicable models of the successful school. Central to this development are issues of teacher competence and managerial efficiency.

It is not that one wishes to disagree with most aspects of this approach: there is much to be learned from school effectiveness studies. The problem lies in the discounting of the intellectual work of teachers, and the persistence and increasing sophistication with which questions relating to learning, cultural difference and inequality have been pursued in schools. It is difficult to imagine how issues of achievement and curricular reform can be addressed without reference to the fruits of this long, collective endeavour. If the problem for teachers is to link their educational objectives to an overall political programme, then - equally - the problem for Labour is to connect its aspirations with the activities and commitments of creative social groups. In the process, it will need to be altogether more dialogic about the nature of its policy than has so far been the case.

NOTES

1. See the Hillcole Group pamphlet, Falling Apart: The Comming Crisis of Conservative Education (1993) for a more detailed, and prescient, analysis.

2. Jane Coles, Enough was Enough: The Teachers' Boycott of National Curriculum Testing, in Changing English, Vol 1 No 2 (1994) pp.16-31.

3. Anthony Quinton, The Politics of Imperfection: The Religious and Secular Traditions of Conservative Thought in England from Hooker to Oakeshott (1978), p16.

4. Viscount Hailsham (Quintin Hogg), The Conservative Case (1959), p13.

5. Michael Oakeshott, Rationalism in Politics in Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays (1962), p21.

6. Anthony Giddens, Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics (1994), p46.

7. ibid., p5.

8. ibid., p6.

9. ibid.

10. Goran Therborn, European Modernity and Beyond: The Trajectory of European Societies 1945-2000 (1995) - Chapter 15.

11. Coles, op. cit.

12. Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education (September 1992); Pete Fraser, Chaucer with Chips, in The English and Media Magazine (No 28), Summer 1993.

13. Bill Schwarz, The Tide of History. The Reconstruction of Conservatism 1945-51 in Nick Tiratsoo (ed.) The Attlee Years (1991), pp.154-55.

14. Christopher Knight, The making of Tory education Policy in Post-war Britain (1990).

15. Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach (1991), p30.

16. ibid., p2.

17. ibid., p52.

18. Alberto Melucci, Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society (1989), p70.

19. ibid., p71.

20. Eyerman and Jamison, op.cit., p149.

21. HMSO, A Language for Life (The "Bullock Report"), (1975), p50.

22. Tony Blair, Realising Our True Potential, Speech at the Institute of Education, University of London, 23/6/1995.

23. National Commission on Education, Learning to Succeed (1993), p13.

24. See, particularly, Children and their Primary Schools ("Plowden") 1967; Half our Future ("Newsom") 1963; Bullock, op.cit.